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ABSTRACT

Art, music, drama and other humanistic disciplines are vital to the fullest development of human potential. They must not be looked upon as educational "frills," but as components of education fully as important as "basics" such as reading, writing and math. Evidence exists that exposure to the arts actually helps children develop their brains, by stimulating greater body awareness and less muscular inhibition. Lack of such stimulation leads to inhibitions in the motor cortex and in the ability to think certain kinds of thoughts and feel certain kinds of feelings. Study of the arts also enhances self-concept and stimulates intellectual curiosity. School librarians have a special power and responsibility to direct children's education. Providing the arts as an integral part of formal education is a necessity that must not be denied. (Author)

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THE ARTS IN EDUCATION: A NECESSITY FOR SCHOOL CHILDREN

BY

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PREFACE

This paper is based on the unproven, yet plausible, assumption that art, music, drama and other humanistic disciplines are vital to the fullest development of human potential. It will attempt to destroy the credence given to that school of thought which purports that certain subjects, such as math, science, and reading are basics, and therefore, all that are really necessary.

Indeed, reading is extremely vital in a society that bases much of its standard of living upon literary. Moreover, minimal functional skills in mathematics and science must be mastered if an individual wants to survive in a society that is developing technologically at an exponential rate. However, one is left with a very discomforting question as we witness the tremendous advance of technology. What, then, shall separate us, as human beings, from the robot, automation or computer?

Even now, it is possible to envision a society in which very few people will actually be needed to control the planet. Indeed, we might very well be at that stage now. Should the wealthy and the technocrats decide that, based on their own set of values, there are too many people on the

earth who are inhibiting the advance of mankind, in general, what can stop them from eradicating millions with ease (via the neutron bomb, for example)? And, who will be left to perform the necessary day to day functions? Of course, the computers, the robots and the automatons! They are quite capable, after being programmed by humans, to read, perform math far beyond the comprehension of the average layperson, analyze scientific data and even do household chores. Therefore, based on this far-reaching, yet plausible conclusion about the future of society, this author contends that to concentrate merely on arbitrarily selected "basics," such as math and science, is ridiculous. Mankind's greatest frontier lies within himself. Our greatest challenge is within the realm of our own minds and in coming to grips with knowing ourselves and in understanding and caring for others within the species. Consider the fact that after millennia of existence of life on earth, man is still the only creature who kills for fun or sport. All other creatures destroy in order to survive. So we must answer these questions: Can instruction in the so-called basics assist the individual in "Knowing thyself" (as stated by the Bible)? With technology already beginning to seriously alter the basic fabric of our society, how can mankind deal with values that will permit us to respect each other as worthy and unique beings, one as equally entitled to life and abundance as any other? In what ways can man prevent losing sight of one often neglected dimension of his multi-faceted personality--the emotional, aesthetic, spiritual and "feeling" components of his nature. The answer lies in the

arts--music, drama, painting, literature, dance and sculpture. These humanistic disciplines probably allow for a much greater range of human expression. And given the freedom to have artistic expression, mankind can come closest to knowing his truest nature; and in achieving this self-insight, he can better deal with those values which recognize the rational and spiritual supremacy of each human being. With these thoughts in mind, the topic of this work will be developed and supported, within the constraints of time and current research data.

THE ARTS IN EDUCATION:
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Public education is currently in the midst of a crisis. This fact is generally accepted by many as such; while the debate continues to rage over what caused the crisis, how do we get out of it and what alternatives should be pursued. One concern that is very much an integral part of the educational crisis is the issue of "back to basics" versus "educational frills." Both phrases are current euphemisms from "educational jargonese"; actually, they are also misnomers. "Back-to-basics" is the catchy phrase that identifies a school of thought among professional educators. This group feels that one solution to the financial and low achievement problems of formal education is to cut unnecessary and/or experimental programs, reimpose stricter disciplinary standards upon students and concentrate on a basic core of vital subjects, such as, reading, spelling, mathematics and science. The "educational frills" school, on the other hand, encompasses those educators whose opinions range from asserting a need for art and music in the public schools to the open classroom/open curriculum philosophy. This group, in varying degrees, realizes that true education is more than reading, spelling and math, as important as these subjects are. To be educated in its fullest sense, an individual must cultivate not only certain functional and literary skills,

but develop what many philosophers consider to be mankind's higher, truer nature: the emotional and the spiritual dimension of man. Undoubtedly, many in this latter group view the crisis in public education as centering around curricula concerns. Finances notwithstanding, the real problem to be addressed is the end product of formal education itself: the student. Indeed, it is not easy to answer the question that surely besets some elementary school teachers as they work with their charges: "How do I adequately prepare this child for a world that's certain to be different when he/she becomes an adult?"

How does one, as an educator, prepare young people for adulthood? Does the answer lie in strict back to basic curriculums? Can the solution be found in open ended humanistic curricula? Should we teach young people how to read and, thereby, how to think more analytically? What about values? Should values be taught and, if so, at what point does the teaching of values become the imposition of values, (generally considered to be an educational "no-no")? This author feels that all of the questions posed suggest components of educational instruction that must not be ignored. To delete anyone is to seriously risk producing a non-quality product, namely a poorly educated individual. It is unfortunate that, in some pedagogical circles, it is now chic to play down the importance of the arts as an unnecessary "frill." Usually, the reason given can be reduced to monetary matters. When the budget is low, something must go. And the courses that are usually first on the "chopping block"

are the humanities classes in art and music. This is a tragic situation. Research now being conducted and released increasingly underscores the belief that humanistic education is just as vital, if not more so, than the traditional "three R's." However, before supporting, with data, the claim that the humanities are necessary in preparing children for adulthood, let's assess the current crisis and trend in public education.

The back to basics school does have research to support their claim that their philosophy is better. The U. S. Office of Education recently sponsored a three million dollar study which shows that children from low-income families fare far better in programs that emphasize structure and basic skills. This study was compiled for the 500 million dollar government effort to raise the educational achievement of poor children. The project, called Follow Through, involved testing a wide range of model curriculums in schools in 100 cities since 1968. The upshot of the experimentation was that only two of the model curriculums--both highly formal--have significantly improved pupil performance. The most successful, called "Distar," has the teacher reading, word for word, from lesson outlines, and children learn by chanting rote responses. Youngsters in this program achieved scores in reading and math that were nearly as high as the national norms.[1]

Experimentation in education certainly was not restricted to the grade school level but left its impact at our colleges and universities, also. During the 1960's, many institutions of higher learning abandoned required courses, by and large,

because of the new awareness brought out by the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. However, college and university faculties are once again expressing concern that some type of requirement be re-instated. Reflecting a back to basics mood is the extensive review given to its undergraduate program by Harvard University. The reviewing committee recently completed a two year study and came up with a series of proposals to establish a "common base for intellectual discourse." Heading this committee was Henry Rosovsky, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. They (the committee) identified six basic characteristics of the educated man or woman:

1) The ability to think and write clearly.

2) An "informal acquaintance with the mathematical and experimental methods of the physical and biological sciences."

3) An "awareness of other cultures and other times."

4) "Some understanding of, and experience in thinking about, moral and ethical problems."

5) "Good manners and high aesthetic and moral standards."

6) Depth in some field of knowledge.[2]

The challenge now facing the task forces at Harvard is to specify how the curriculum should be designed to insure that all graduates possess those qualities.

Of course, not all of the back to basics advocates are primarily concerned with curriculum and content. Some are money managers and accountants and tend to view the operation

of a public school system in terms of debits and credits. Just this school year, Cleveland, Ohio school officials have cut six million dollars from this year's budget by trimming services and extracurricular activities. In 1978, they may have to lay off teachers, abolish Kindergarden, sports, and arts programs and close school libraries. "The only hope," says school board president Arnold R. Pinkney, "is more state money, more Federal money, perhaps even a share of the local income tax."[3]

One effort that has been made to counteract the negative effects of limited school budgets and subsequent cutbacks is the lively new show called "Music," now being shown in prime time on stations of the Public Broadcasting Service. "Music" will be particularly welcome in the many U. S. school districts where tight budgets have curtailed education in the fine arts. Murry Sidlin, conductor of the New Haven Symphony Orchestra and music director and host of "Music" says, "Music and art have become frills. In too many schools they have been put on death row."[4]

Not everyone, however, is willing to acquiesce to the claim that music and art courses are frills, depending for their existence upon the good nature of the voter in a millage election. Music and art are too innately a part of the human experience to be dismissed as casually as sand pebbles on the rocky coast of Maine. Throughout centuries and into our own time, people have expressed the overwhelming importance of the humanities and the arts for individual development and fulfillment. Music is everywhere considered to be the universal language. The

Greek philosopher Plato "perceived that the natural laws governing the structure of the universe--harmony and proportion, balance and rhythm--also govern music, dance, painting, poetry, and so on; he therefore urged making these art forms a foundation of educational method."[5] The British art critic Herbert Read, in Education Through Art, said, "In the end I do not distinguish science and art, except as methods. Art is the representation, science the explanation--of the same reality." Moreover, the American psychologist Abraham H. Maslow believed that the arts are far closer to the core of education than are the more exalted subjects. Education emphasizing art, music, and dance, Maslow said in 1967, can be a glimpse into the infinite, into ultimate values."

A more contemporary yet equally valid observation was made recently by the current conductor of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Antal Dorati stated that "the service...we makers of music are called upon to render is one of the most valuable in the world: to give pleasure and stimulation to the mind in the most sublime way, to alleviate stress, relax tight nerves, give a few hours of centered, meaningful, alert repose, and through it to renew the strength we all need...This has been the task and the role of the arts through millenniums..."[6]

To those individuals intimately associated with the arts and the expression of art, it might be difficult to understand why so many people can insensitively downgrade the status of the arts in education. This author has taken the assumption that the simplest explanation for the attitudes of these people

is that they do not fully understand why the arts are a must in elementary education, or in public education per se. Another plausible explanation lies in the fact that the arts have always been relegated to a peripheral role in American culture, including American education. Persons who pursue the arts are often regarded as odd if not effete. The public schools reflect this attitude. Therefore, an attempt shall be made in this paper to present some data to support my contention that the arts are an indispensable facet of formal education.

We are gravely in danger of creating a class of human robots. Not nearly enough students in our schools are being challenged to use their brains--to be sharp, inquiring and penetrating. "We cannot afford...to lull and deceive...students into believing that such disciplines as the precise use of the English language...the correct spelling of words, the reading and analysis of the works of Shakespeare or Chaucer or the Greek playwrights, the mastery of the basic skills in mathematics, the skill in test-taking, essay tests included--are irrelevant."[7] To do this would certainly blind and relegate a large segment of our population to the status of "mindless robots." It is vital that every person associated with the education of children--librarians, teachers, administrators, parents, legislators--be made cognizant, if not so already, of the fact that the arts provide the type of expression and stimulation of the mind and body which enhances creativity and analytical thinking. The arts have far more than an enrichment role to play in education. They appear to stimulate a child's natural

curiosity and--perhaps literally--to expand the capacity of his brain. The arts even help children discover their own worth and identity and thereby point the way to future happiness. Citing in their findings that the arts are fundamental to the learning experience, a panel of distinguished educators and business people, headed by David Rockefeller, Jr., made almost 100 recommendations about the need for the arts. The panel spent $300,000 to produce a report decrying the state of the arts in education. The Rockefeller report, though criticized because of its omission of certain outstanding researchers and success stories in this particular field, nevertheless is a major step toward the goal of establishing the arts as a basic subject in the schools. If the arts do receive "basic" status, then, hopefully, our society can discourage the transmutation of humans into protoplasmic automatons. The emphasis in education will then be on individuality, creativity, self-development and self-expression.

A question that must be addressed yet cannot be definitively answered at present is how do the arts help children learn? Research to answer this question has progressed to the stage of providing clues and indicators but no clear answers. Dr. Robert Masters of the Foundation for Mind Research says that "the arts stimulate greater body awareness and less muscular inhibition. Lack of stimulation of that sort leads to inhibitions in the motor cortex and in the ability to think certain kinds of thoughts and feel certain kinds of feelings."[8] It is known that before the age of about six the brain increases in "gray matter," or cell neurons. The neurons make innumerable

interconnections and associations based on sensory perception such as sight, touch and sound. By a process still unknown to man, these associations are stored in the brain as learning and are critical to our ability to recall events from the past. If these connections and associations are not made at an early age, it is probable that the brain's neurons suffer something analogous to muscular atrophy. In other words, the development of the brain becomes stunted.[9] Dr. Jean Houston, also of the Foundation for Mind Research (Pomona, New York), adds that, "the child without access to a stimulating arts program is being systematically cut off from most of the ways in which he can perceive the world. His brain is being systematically damaged. In many ways he is being de-educated."[10]

Unfortunately, many of the children who lack access to a stimulating arts program are poor white, Black and minority children who depend most on the public school system to provide it. When arts programs were cut in cities such as Detroit, New York and Columbus, Ohio, a very large percentage of the affected youngsters were Black and Latinos whose parents either cannot afford and/or unaware of the vital importance of providing training in the arts in supplementary form. Many experienced art teachers know that work in art can favorably affect a child's self-concept. For the non-verbal child, success in a non-verbal area can often provide the courage needed to attack other highly verbal educational procedures. Furthermore, the "lack of visual and tactile stimuli in the environment of the poverty child results in inferior visual discrimination which

negatively affects reading performance."[11]

Doris L. Barclay, in her pilot study, "Art education for the economically and racially deprived child," found that children coming from a depressed urban area had limited visual, spatial, color, and textural awareness expressed in their beginning art productions. She quotes the 1964 Hunt Report (J. McV. Hunt, "The psychological basis for cultural preschool enrichment as an antidote for cultural deprivation") which states that "the amount and variety of stimulation to which children are exposed apparently affects their intellectual achievement."[12]

Art education as a stimulator and motivator is paramount, particularly when working with economically disadvantaged young people. Achieving success in art makes a child feel better about himself. B. R. Brown, in his work The Assessment of Self-Concept Among Four-Year Old Negro and White Children: A Comparative Study says that by the age of 4, a Black child has already developed a negative self-image. To rectify this poor self-concept, Kenneth R. Beettel, in Research in Art Education comments, "One of the goals of learning in art is the development of the capacity for creative action as indicated by changes in one's personality or self-concept."[13]

Art represents the individual's perception of his/her world. One perceives; one identifies their perception; one restates this perception in some objective form, whether it be in paint, clay, film, sound, movement, or words. Art not only communicates ideas to others, but the artist clarifies the

ideas with himself. Art can help a Black person in a white world to discover, in another dimension, who he/she is. Art becomes an extension of the person--thus one learns to know himself better.

In addition to enhancing self-awareness, the arts in education have other advantages for encouraging the wholesome development of children in school. For the sake of clarity and emphasis, these advantages are listed as follows:

1) Art can assist affective development and expression.

2) Success in art makes a child feel better about himself.

3) Scholars who study the ghetto child realize that the generally accepted educational practices and values are insufficient. The arts hold great potential for the discovery of new techniques for educating.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LIBRARIANS

Librarians possess the keys to a tremendous amount of power and influence. As the guardians, organizers, dispensers and, often, interpreters of mankind's storehouse of knowledge, librarians are in a perfect position to command the respect and impact on the thinking of others in positions of power. And, since librarians are also educators in a very real sense, it is incumbent upon this professional group to exercise responsibility and a sense of authority about the substance and direction of education for children. Librarians must continue to realize and emphasize the fact that if humanity is to continue its progression towards "becoming" and not self-destruct, then those human values which support and encourage growth must be nurtured. Indeed, librarians can be the breast-feeders of human growth and development by making the following decisions and, then, act upon them. In so doing, librarians will use those keys of power now in their trust.

1) Librarians must be aware of the nature of the arts. They must be sensitive to the human needs which only artistic expression can fulfill. This awareness and sensitivity within librarians will deepen their understanding of humanity, in general, and of themselves, in particular. As understanding increases between humans, so does tolerance, compassion and respect for each individual's intrinsic worth.

2) Librarians must join coalitions with other professional groups, with decision-making power, which impact on the education of children. Gone are the days when persons or groups can make decisions which affect the education of children without seeking input from librarians. Librarians must be aggressive enough to seek out the decision makers, demand to be listened to and have their proposals seriously weighed, and be assertive enough to speak and act against mediocrity and injustice.

3) To support the arts in education, and emphasize its potential for helping mankind better understand itself, librarians themselves must display their own creative talents. Activities which support the arts in education can range from book fairs or bulletin board displays to dance or musical concerts and painting exhibitions within the walls of the library itself!

4) Scholarly librarians must do more research on the true nature of man--the inner person, the emotional, spiritual and subconscious nature of the human being. Mankind's present knowledge reflects the height to which humanity has risen; yet, the surface has barely been scratched. The scholar-librarian with the tools of research at his or her command, is in an excellent position to delve into, analyze and decipher facts and theories--new and old. There is no reason why the librarian, as scholar, should not, be in the vanguard of research efforts into mankind's last real frontier--the subconscious mind.

5) Librarians cannot afford to be dreamy-eyed idealists whose preoccupation with index cards, rows of stacks, and boxes of microfiche tend to obscure the realities of the everyday world. If political "games" must be played in order to advance humanity, then play them, with astuteness. If funds must be raised in order to continue service to people, then "get out there" with innovative

strategies to raise money. If a school board threatens to cut an arts program because it is not deemed necessary, then protest, by every legal means available, at least. Librarians have had to do these things before; indications are that they will have to be done again.

6) Finally, librarians must not limit themselves. Many individuals and groups fail to achieve because of a myopic view of their role, status or position, as it relates to other individuals or groups. Librarians must have the primary responsibility for determining who they are and what they are about. "As you think, you shall become" is the dictum that applies here. Librarians must divorce themselves from any traditional images and preconceived notions that have existed. Since the only evidence of life is growth, it naturally follows that a living profession cannot remain status quo. Tradition has its place since it provides a sense of stability, or a sense of roots, to humanity. But tradition must not be allowed to set arbitrary limits on any person or group, when what is being demanded is development, flexibility and change, or perish. Librarians can and must rise to the challenge and worship the idea that anything and everything are possible.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

Providing the arts as an integral part of formal education is a necessity that must not be denied. Art exists by virtue of the fact that humanity exists. To attempt to divorce the arts from educational endeavors or to label such as a "frill" is absurd. Only an idiot would touch fire and attempt to convince himself that it does not burn. Likewise, only foolish educators would endeavor to touch the lives of children and attempt to convince themselves that creative expression, a cornerstone of the arts, is not necessary. The arts are as necessary a part of formal education as the child is himself. Society must be educated and shown the truth that supports this conclusion.

This work is by no means definitive. Much research data has been omitted. There exists many examples of studies and experiments which have been done that show the direct relationship between pupil achievement in school and pupil involvement in school arts program. In the near future, this work will revised to include these examples, and, thereby, create a more persuasive argument in favor of the arts in education.

FOOTNOTES

[1]"Basic is Better," Newsweek, (New York: July 4, 1977), Volume XC, No. 1, p. 76.

[2]Malcolm Scully, "Back to Basics," Nutshell, (Knoxville, Fall, 1977), p. 73.

[3]Merrill Sheils, "Ohio Squeeze," Newsweek, (New York: October 31, 1977), Volume XC, No. 18, p. III.

[4]Frederick Boyd, "Tuning In," Newsweek, (New York: October 24, 1977), Volume XC, No. 17, p. III.

[5]Roger M. Williams, "Why Children Should Draw: The Surprising Link Between Art and Learning," Saturday Review, September 9, 1977, p. 13.

[6]Antal Dorati, "To the large and growing musical family of Detroit," (Excerpt taken from the Detroit Symphony Orchestra Program. September 29-October 1, 1977, p. 39)

[7]Estelle W. Taylor, "Modes and 'Role Models' in Education," The Crisis, (New York: November, 1977), Volume 84, No. 9, p. 428.

[8]Roger M. Williams, Op.Cit., p. 14.

[9]Ibid., p. 13-14.

[10]Ibid., p. 14.

[11]Elaine P. Cohen, "Does Art Matter in the Education of the Black Ghetto Child," Young Children, (March , 1974), Volume 29, No. 3, p. 171-172.

[12]Doris L. Barclay, "A Pilot Study: Art education for the economically and socially deprived child," Unpublished research, U. S. Office of Education, Small Contract Grant, 1969.

[13]Cohen, Op.Cit., p. 172.

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